



The Augur

Journal of the Biblical Numismatic Society

9301 Wilshire Boulevard, Beverly Hills, California 90210-5499

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Published by Superior Stamp and Coin Company, Established in 1930

Superior to Auction Rare Shekels

Jewish Shekels minted in each of the first four years of the First Revolt (66/67 - 69/70 AD), along with Half Shekels issued in the first three years, will be included along with other ancient Judaeen coins, in a major auction to be held in Los Angeles by Superior Stamp and Coin Company August 8, 9, 10, 1983. Of particular interest is the extremely rare Year Four Shekel (69/70 AD) which is in Extremely Fine condition, and could bring a five-figure price. Members of the Biblical Numismatic Society will receive the auction catalogue gratis. If you have any questions on the bidding procedure, direct them to Mel Wacks.



Extremely rare Year Four Shekel
to be sold at Superior auction.

Summer Seminar

Mel Wacks, of the Biblical Numismatic Society, will conduct a comprehensive week-long seminar at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) from August 7-13, 1983 under the sponsorship of the American Numismatic Association. Topics to be discussed include: reading the ancient Hebrew coin inscriptions, coin symbols, the art of grading, valuations, detecting fakes, and of course the historical background of the Maccabees, Herodians, Procurators, the Jewish Revolts, Jesus and the Apostles as seen through contemporary coins. Slides will be shown and actual coins will be examined by course participants.

Here's an opportunity to combine your avocation with your vacation! Complementing the classroom study are many attractions for students' free time, including a golf course, athletic fields, jogging trails, a quarter-mile Olympic track, 21 tennis courts, two gymnasiums for swimming and basketball, and the Sunset Canyon Recreation Center. And nearby are Disneyland, the Hollywood Bowl, and other Southern California attractions.

Tuition for the Biblical Numismatic Seminar, including all classes, lodging and meals is a bargain \$295. Checks should be rushed to ANA Summer Seminars, P.O. Box 2366 Colorado Springs, CO 80901; for further information contact the ANA or Mel Wacks at the BNS.



Collection of the half shekel tax collected for maintenance of the Temple in Jerusalem is shown in this engraving from the Hebrew-Latin Mishnah, illustrated in Amsterdam by Michael Richey, between 1700 and 1704.

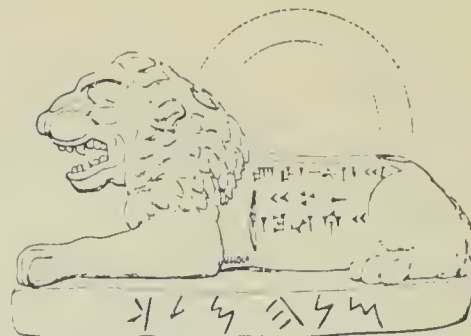
The Half Shekel Temple Tax

The Temple Tax can be traced back to the time of the Exodus when The Lord spake unto Moses, saying. . .this they shall give, everyone that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the Lord. The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel. . .And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation (Exodus 30: 11-15, King James Version).

The term "bekah," meaning a half shekel, is used in Exodus 38:26, showing how this Temple Tax collection served as a census: A bekah for every man, that is, half a shekel, after the shekel of the sanctuary. . .for six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty men.

Besides the half shekels, other monies came to the Temple as war booty, allocations assigned by kings and generals, donations that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of the Lord, and as a tax based upon age and sex. This latter tax amounted to 50 shekels for males (20-60 years), 30 shekels for females (20-60 years), and even children from the age of one month were assessed five shekels for males and three shekels for females. Thus, it can be seen, the Half Shekel Temple Tax was merely a token payment.

At the time of the Exodus (early 13th Century BC) coinage had not yet been invented. The half shekel was a standard weight of silver—about 176.46 grains or 112.48



One maneh, an Assyrian weight, was cast in the form of a lion and represented wealth in the palace of Assur-izir paliin about 880 BC. These pieces often came with a handle; broken lines indicate the location of the missing handle. Assyrian and Hebrew inscriptions appear on the lion. Similar lions weight 48.7 grams; the extra ring about 3.6 grams.

grains, depending on the system used. These weights were inscribed bracelets, animals, dome shaped stones, etc.

In the reign of Joash (c. 800 BC) he resolved to repair the damages done to the Temple. And at the king's commandment they made a chest and set it without at the gate of the house of the Lord. And they made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in to the house of the Lord the collection that Moses the servant of God laid upon Israel in the wilderness (II Chron. 24:8-9). At this time the half shekel was still a weight of silver, probably measured against a standard domed piece of limestone engraved "bekah." Both in the Temple and in the country at large the chests (shofarot) were set up for Joash's collection. The 13 shofarot in the Temple were each inscribed with the object for which the money collected was to be spent, such as wood for the altar, incense, the vestments of the high priest, animal inspectors and even for the maintenance of Jerusalem's water system and tower repairs.

Third of a Shekel

After the return from the Babylonian/Persian captivity, some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place. They gave after



COIN
OF
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MONTH



Gold daric of Persia with obverse showing king holding a bow and javelin; reverse shows an irregular incuse square.

their ability unto the treasure of the work three score and one thousand drams of gold and five thousand pounds of silver (Ezra 2:68-69). The dram was the standard Persian gold coin — the daric. The silver contributions, besides bullion, must have been Persian sigloi. Both of these coins show the Persian king holding a spear or bow; there is no inscription.

By 515 BC the Second Temple was completed. Some years later (c. 440 BC) Nehemiah made ordinances. . .to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God (Nehemiah 10:32). But why suddenly was there a shift from the half shekel Mosaic Temple Tax that had been the standard for about 700 years, to one third of a shekel? Evidently it was a realistic approach since the standard silver coin throughout Judea and the surrounding lands was the Persian siglos.

A typical Persian siglos (521-400 BC), lot number 234, Superior Auction of Dec. 7, 1972, weighed 84.2 grains. Assuming that this coin was indeed the Biblical third of a shekel, would mean that the equivalent shekel would have had to weigh 252.6 grains. And sure enough, Madden indicates that the standard "shekel of the king" weighed 252.9165 grains. QED.

Shekel of Tyre

Reifenberg devotes four pages to a silver coin inscribed "bekah" in ancient Hebrew, which he theorizes was minted under Nehemiah's authority. This is a unique coin and possibly represents an early attempt to return to the half shekel Temple Tax. And, indeed, the Jews did revert back to the half shekel contribution some time later when the shekels and half shekels minted by the Phoenician city of Tyre were accepted by the priests as the standard to be used for payment of the Temple Tax.



Melqart-Herakles faces right on obverse of this shekel of Tyre, issued during a period of autonomy, 126 BC - 66 AD. A laurel wreath can be seen on the head; a lion skin is knotted around his neck. Eagle has a ship in right claw, carries a palm branch over the shoulder. Date and name of Tyre appear in Greek letters.

These dated coins, which feature the likeness of the Tyrian city god, Melqart (similar to the Greek god Hercules), were issued in great numbers from 126-125 BC to 69-70 AD. The reverse shows an eagle standing on a ship with a palm branch over its shoulder; a club appears in the field. The Greek inscription reads "Tyre the holy and inviolable."

Because of the commandment, Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, the Jews did not place the likeness of any living thing on their ancient coins (with the exception of Herodian portrait



Half shekel of Tyre, struck during the Seleucid period, shows head of Melqart facing right, wearing laurel wreath. Eagle on reverse holds a palm branch.

coins and a single type with an eagle issued by Herod the Great). So why were the Tyrian shekels and half shekels, which not only contained the likeness of a living thing (eagle) but of a foreign god (Melqart), specified by Talmudic law as being acceptable for payment of the Temple Tax and other Judaic tithes?

Florence Banks, author of "Coins of Bible Days," points out that the basis for the Talmudic distinction "apparently had nothing to do with the matter of 'idolatrous' designs which sometimes caused the Jews to ban certain coins, for obviously the image of the Phoenician god Melqart on the Tyrian shekel was quite as 'idolatrous' as the representations of the emperor Augustus and the Roman goddess Fortuna on Antioch's silver piece of equal value."

Mrs. Banks draws the interesting conclusion that "the reason why the tetradrachms of Antioch were banned by the priests was that they did not contain enough silver to meet the Mosaic specifications for Temple contributions. Those of Tyre, on the other hand, were heavy enough to be satisfactory." However, the weights given for various tetradrachms in Head's "Historia Numorum" would seem to belie Mrs. Bank's conclusion:

Antiochaea ad Urontem (Augustus)	220-236 grains
Aradus, Phoenicia	239 grains
Sidon, Phoenicia	
Double Shekel	397-441 grains
Tetradrachm.	223.8 grains
Tyre, Phoenicia.	224 grains
Jewish shekel, First Revolt	220 grains

Perhaps the Jews were again being practical, just as they had modified the half shekel Temple Tax to a third of a shekel, when the available coinage was more conducive for the latter. So, at this later period the shekels of Tyre were far more plentiful to the Judeans than any other silver coinage. Even when the Jews at last minted their own silver shekels and half shekels during the First Revolt against Rome (66-70 AD) the two silver coinages — Tyrian and Judean — coexisted. Several hoards consisting of the two types of coinages are described by Kadman in "The Coins of the Jewish War."

Jesus and the Tribute

The first reference to the Temple Tax in the New Testament is in Matthew: And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus. . .saith, notwithstanding, lest we should offend them goest thou to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money; that take, and give unto them for me and thee (Matthew 17:24-27).

Madden states that Jesus' comment, least it offend them, shows that the Jews willingly paid the tribute and that it was not generally enforced by law, even from the earliest times.

The original word used for piece of money is "stater," equivalent to the Greek tetradrachm or the Tyrian shekel. It was most likely the latter coin which was found in the fish's mouth since the shekels of Tyre were struck as late as 69-70 AD. While Madden believed that the coin in the fish's mouth was a tetradrachm of Augustus, struck at Antioch, he also states that "no doubt the ordinary coin paid was that miraculously supplied". . .and that could only be the shekel (and half shekels) of Tyre. Thirty years later, it is speculated by Sutherland, that a shipment of Temple dues consisting of 3,400 Tyrian shekels and 1,000 halves, and some other coins ("The Mount Carmel Hoard") was intercepted by the Romans en route for Jerusalem. Josephus also witnessed the use of Tyrian shekels at the time of the First Revolt.

The single stater was used to pay the Temple (or Tribute) Tax for both Peter and Jesus rather than two half denominations. Again, some 30 years later when the Jews had their own silver shekels and half shekels it was common to pay the Temple Tax for two people with a single shekel rather than with two half shekels. Meshorer indicates that it was far preferable to make the payment in this manner since the weight of two silver half shekels (average 6.83 grams each) was less than the single shekels (average 14.17 grams).

The ancient Jews, and all ancient peoples, were most conscious of the differences in coin values which were based almost wholly on the silver (or other precious metal) content, thus accounting for the role of the money changers who could probably be found in each village.

The short weight of the Jewish half shekels, and before them the Tyrian half shekels (14.04 grams average per Tyrian shekel vs. 6.68 grams average per Tyrian half shekel) could be accounted for by seigniorage — the striking charge elicited by the government mint as its profit per

piece manufactured. Using a little elementary algebra, assuming that the striking cost was the same for a Jewish shekel or half shekel, the seigniorage can be computed to have been about .51 gram, or a little less than 1/30 shekel.



The famous "Tribute Penny," struck by Tiberius, was payable by Jews to the Roman Emperor; this was not part of the Temple Tax paid by Jews.

Thus, a person paying his Temple Tax with a Jewish or Tyrian half shekel might have had to add the difference — say eight small bronze leptons — to be equivalent to half of the value of silver in a full shekel.

During Jesus' time not only was there a half shekel per year Temple Tax but there was a tax collection (Tribute) for the Roman Emperor as well. The exact amount of this civil tax is unknown but it was referred to in Matthew, Mark and Luke: And he saith unto them, whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God, the things that are God's (Matthew 22:20-21). The coin referred to here is likely a denarius of Augustus. And it is evidently this civil tax which is referred to when Jesus was accused before Pilate of forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, since the Romans wouldn't care if Jesus had not paid the Temple tax.

The Widow's Mite

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites (Mark 12:41-42).



All of the small bronze coins shown were in circulation in the time of Jesus and are candidates for the "Widow's Mite."

These small bronze "mites" must have been acceptable for the Temple treasury. The most likely bronze leptons would be those of the Maccabees (135-37 BC), but could possibly have been coins of Herod the Great (37-4 BC), Herod Archelaus (4 BC-6 AD), or the Procurators (6-36 AD) which include those of Pontius Pilate himself.

(to be continued)